



CAPITOL NEWS

FOR THE PEOPLE OF THE 21ST MICHIGAN SENATE DISTRICT

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SENATORS START HEARINGS ON GRADUATION REQUIREMENTS.

Members of the Senate Education Committee have begun hearing thoughts and concerns about a proposal to enact statewide high school graduation requirements. Committee members plan to have hearings throughout the state. The proposal has been well-received, but Senators want to hear from parents, teachers, school leaders, job providers and others. The proposal from the state Board of Education would require that students take a certain number of years of English, math, science and other subjects before being allowed to graduate. Michigan, which now requires just a half year of civics class to graduate, is among just a few states that have no or almost no graduation requirements. One of the hearings is scheduled to be held on February 20, 2006 at the Kalamazoo RESA at 10:30 a.m. RESA is located at 1819 Millham Road, Kalamazoo.

WELFARE LEGISLATION SIGNED INTO LAW. Michigan's welfare policy would be improved and opportunities for the state's neediest expanded under reforms that were recently signed into law. The Legislature wanted to focus on state programs that offer job training and educational opportunities to long-term welfare recipients. The legislative package will strengthen accountability



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for people abusing the welfare system and improve accountability measures for state departments to ensure long-term welfare recipients are identified and efforts focused on them.

NURSING MOMS EXEMPT FROM JURY DUTY. Under Senate Bill 529, which unanimously passed the Senate, nursing mothers would be exempt from jury duty if they receive a doctor's note. Other states already have similar family-friendly legislation and it is time Michigan does as well. The legislation was introduced after lawmakers heard from leaders of a group advocating on behalf of nursing moms. Under the proposal, nursing women could be excused from jury duty if they provide a note from a physician or certified nurse midwife.

REMOVE BALLOT QUESTION OVERSIGHT FROM THE BOARD OF STATE CANVASSERS. Legislation introduced recently in the Michigan Senate would give responsibility for putting ballot questions before voters to professional, nonpartisan Secretary of State staff instead of the Board of State Canvassers. Senators have criticized some board members for failing to put a ballot question regarding affirmative action before voters despite being ordered to by a state judge and advised to do so by nonpartisan, professional staff of the Secretary of State's Office and the Attorney General's Office. People seeking to put the question before voters clearly had more than enough petition signatures than are required by law. The package of bills would make the director of the state Bureau of Elections responsible for approving the ballot petitions as to form and deciding whether ballot questions have received an adequate number of signatures to go before voters. The elections director is a nonpartisan, civil service position within the Secretary of State's Office. The proposed legislation would retain the board's constitutional role in certifying election results.

LEADERS FIND EXTRA STATE DOLLARS TO SAVE. Legislation introduced to help make sure Michigan is prepared for economic uncertainty was approved by the Legislature. Based on projections from the Consensus Revenue Estimating Conference on January 12, a budget surplus of \$116.3 million is available for the state's savings account from the book closing for Fiscal Year 2004-2005. If signed into law, Senate Bill 956 would place the surplus into the Budget Stabilization Fund. An amendment added to SB 956 would set aside \$21.5 million in Low-Income Energy Assistance Funds for heating assistance for low-income utility customers. According to the Senate Fiscal Agency, an objective, nonpartisan organization, the money will be used to assist low-income Michigan residents pay their utility bills and for weatherization projects designed to reduce homeowner utility costs. SB 956 was presented to the Governor last week.